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1856-1906

A HANDBOOK

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AT CHICAGO

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CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Dearborn Avenue and Ontario Street

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A HANDBOOK

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1906

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CHICAGO

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CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY LIBRARY

Previous to the great Chicago fire of 1871 there were but two libraries in Chicago open to the public. One of these was that of the Young Men's Association, organized in 1841. The other was the Chicago Historical Society Library, founded in 1856, which may be said to have had a continuous existence of fifty years, for although the entire collection, amounting to 100,000 volumes, manuscripts, and pamphlets, was destroyed October 9, 1871, yet before the end of November of that year, active steps had been taken to resume the work. Sister societies in all parts of this country, and even abroad, contributed their publications and duplicates, and the New England Historic Genealogical Society, of Boston, placed a room in its new fire-proof building at the disposal of this Society, to which the various donations were sent until a safe place of deposit could be provided. Very considerable collections were soon made and forwarded to Chicago, only to be consumed in the fire of July, 1874. Undismayed by this second calamity, a few enterprising and cultured men, true to the brave and sterling qualities for which Chicago has become famous, stood together and began again the work of the Society, at a time when men of less exalted ideals would have felt justified in turning their whole attention to the re-establishment of their own homes. As the result of such heroic effort the Society met for the first time in its temporary building, October 16, 1877, with the nucleus of a third collection, and with a prestige heightened by these vicissitudes. It was

even possible to reassemble the greater portion of the rare books and newspapers destroyed, for members of the Society contributed their personal copies of these works, and hundreds of volumes in the Library bear the autographs of pioneer citizens.

An attempt to give a list of the prominent residents who have been members of this organization and supporters of its Library would result in naming almost every public-spirited man who has aided in developing the commercial, artistic, and literary growth of Chicago. The officers who have successively served the Society are as follows:

Presidents.—William H. Brown, Walter L. Newberry, J. Young Scammon, Edwin H. Sheldon, Isaac N. Arnold, E. B. Washburne, Edward G. Mason, John N. Jewett, and the present incumbent, Franklin H. Head.

Secretaries and Librarians.—Rev. William Barry (the founder of the Society), assisted by Samuel Stone; Thomas H. Armstrong, Lemuel G. Olmstead, J. W. Hoyt, William Corkran, Belden F. Culver, Albert D. Hagar, assisted by Charles Harpel; John Moses, Charles Evans, James W. Fertig, present Secretary; Caroline M. McIlvaine, present Librarian.

Sources of Income.—Mr. Henry D. Gilpin, a public-spirited and scholarly citizen of Philadelphia, who died in 1860, made a bequest to the Society, which yielded $75,000, for the erection of a fire-proof library building, and above $64,000 for its endowment. Others who have made bequests to the Society have been John Crerar, Lucretia Pond, George M. Pullman, Elizabeth Hammond Stickney, Jonathan Burr, Philo Carpenter, Mrs. J. Y. Scammon, Huntington W. Jackson, Henry J. Willing, Elias T. Watkins, and T. Mauro Garrett. The interest on these funds, together with the

dues of its members, constitute the only sources of revenue of the Society.

Buildings.—The Society has occupied successively the following homes: 1856–68, Newberry Building, northeast corner Wells and Kinzie streets; 1868–71, Society's Building (first), Dearborn Avenue and Ontario Street; 1872–74, number 209 Michigan Avenue; 1877–92, Society's Building (second), Dearborn Avenue and Ontario Street; 1892–96, collections stored; since 1896 Society's Building (third), Dearborn Avenue and Ontario Street. In 1892 the Henry D. Gilpin fund, having by careful investment more than doubled itself, and the legacy under the will of John Crerar having become available, it was determined to solicit from its members subscriptions for the erection of a permanent fire-proof home for the Society, on the site at the corner of Dearborn Avenue and Ontario Street so long identified with its history. To this appeal the members responded with their unfailing liberality. The temporary building being cleared away, the corner-stone of the new structure was laid with appropriate ceremonies, November 12, 1892, and on the evening of December 15, 1896, in the presence of a brilliant and representative gathering, the formal dedication took place.

To the energy of its president, Edward G. Mason, who was at once a man of affairs, an historian, and a bibliophile, this consummation of the designs of the early founders is due. Under his direction, and at a cost of $190,000, exclusive of the land, a scheme of fire-proof construction and furnishing was executed which in completeness has no equal in a building used for similar purposes in the world. The design is Romanesque and being carried out in Aberdeen red granite, steel, and tile, the effect is one of massiveness,

and great durability is secured. The absolute safety from fire has aided to make this Library a repository for donations of valuable manuscripts, relics, and portraits.

After passing the outer doors of ornamental bronze one enters the main hall, which extends two stories in height, and is lighted from above by a sky-light. This hall is devoted to portraits and relics of representatives of the French *régime* in the Mississippi Valley. Here is a fireplace built of relics of the great fire—stones taken from the old Illinois Central depot, Cook County Court House, and the Nixon Building.

At the left of the entrance is the Reading Room, the walls of which are hung with portraits of historical characters connected with the history of Illinois. Here, also, are kept current periodicals, reference works, and the file of the Chicago Tribune, which, with its predecessors, the Press and the Democrat, goes back to 1833. Back of the Reading Room is the Gilpin Library, which at night is shut off from the rest of the building by sliding iron doors. Here the books are all stored in iron cases with movable stone shelves.

On the right of the main entrance is the John Crerar Hall, the lecture hall of the Society, where are placed marble busts and oil-portraits of persons prominent in the history of Chicago, who have been members of this Society.

Ascending the broad stairway from the main hall, one passes a series of bronze relief portraits by Kemeys, of the French explorers, Indians, and some of the famous hunters and trappers of the Central West. On the second landing hangs a full-length oil-portrait of Shabona, the well-known Chicago Indian, painted from life by Webber. Scenes in the life of Father Marquette, done in relief by McNeil, occupy the gallery about the main hall on the second floor. From this gallery open the Manuscript Room, the Stickney

Library, and the Museum, which latter contains objects illustrating the development of the Chicago region from prehistoric times to the present.

On the third floor are the Newspaper Room, the United States Document Room, and the Duplicate Room.

Scope of the Library.—Contrary to popular belief the Library does not consist mainly of works relating to Chicago, although its collection of Chicago material is probably more extensive than that of any other library. As stated in its constitution the Society was formed "to collect and preserve the materials of history, and to spread historical information, especially concerning the Northwestern states." By common consent this has been extended to include the Mississippi Valley. With the above object in view the officers of the Society have, through the years, watched the book-marts of the world to purchase for the Library the source books, and above all the manuscripts and documents, which would make this collection a store-house for future writers and teachers of history, where might be found all the materials for reference and original research relative to every line of interest in the Middle West. In fact, "history" has been defined in its broadest sense to include all that goes to make up the development of this region along economic, social, political, scientific, and artistic lines. The total number of volumes, manuscripts, and pamphlets is 140,000.

Manuscripts.—The James Madison Papers, 1778–1836, purchased for the Society by Mr. Marshall Field, consist of eight large volumes, containing some 1,400 letters and papers, written during the time Madison was delegate to the Continental Congress, member of the Constitutional Convention, and of the first Congress, Secretary of State, and President of the United States. Three volumes con-

tain the letters of John Armstrong, Joseph Jones, and Edmund Randolph to James Madison, and throw light upon all the important occurrences of those times.

The James Wilkinson Papers, 1779–1823, are contained in four magnificent folio volumes, bound in full morocco, and each manuscript is mounted separately. In this collection, besides letters written by Wilkinson, are letters from Thomas Jefferson, Timothy Pickering, General Dearborn, W. C. C. Claiborne, Governor of Louisiana; Marquis of Casa Calvo, Spanish commandant at New Orleans; Morales, Spanish commandant at Pensacola; Auguste Chouteau, of St. Louis; and copies of letters from Aaron Burr and others relating to Burr's movements and capture.

The Ninian Edwards Papers, consisting of the letters and documents, public and private (1800–32), of Illinois's territorial governor, are an especially interesting commentary upon the politics and manners of his day, particularly in the Northwest. A portion of these papers form volume III. of the Society's Collections, for the publication of which the Society is indebted to Mr. Marshall Field.

The Pierre Menard Papers comprise three quarto volumes, largely official documents of the first lieutenant governor of Illinois, who held almost every office in the power of the people of Illinois to bestow.

The papers relating to the French *régime* in Illinois and in the Mississippi Valley, consist of original documents and letters in the handwriting of Joliet, Allouez, La Salle, Tonty, Frontenac, and other governors of New France, copies of the parish registers of the early French missions, etc. Among these documents is the letter of La Salle, dated at Chicagou, September 1, 1683, in which he gives his parting directions to Tonty and the little band left at Fort St. Louis.

GILPIN LIBRARY, CHICAGO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Another document of even greater historic interest is the deed, or bill of sale, given by François de la Forest, the partner of Tonty, to Michel Acau, by which De la Forest's share of the land that is now Starved Rock, was conveyed to Acau. This is in all probability the first deed to real estate within the present state of Illinois.

The Papers of President James K. Polk consist of the Diary kept during his administration, 1845–48, and original drafts of documents, 1826–48.

In addition to the above collection the Society has some 14,000 individual manuscripts bound and indexed. These consist of many documents, letters, and reminiscences of Illinois pioneers, and additions are constantly being made by early residents.

Gilpin Library.—Leaving the Manuscript Room and returning to the first floor, we come to the Library proper, with its many dingy russet-colored volumes bearing on their bindings the blind or gold tooling of a bygone epoch. These are the original editions of the writings of the explorers of the Mississippi Valley. First and foremost of these rarities is Melchisedech Thevenot's *Recueil de Voyages*, in which motley collection of pamphlets Marquette's narrative of his voyage down the Mississippi first saw the light in print, though in abridged form, and accompanied by a map which Marquette never saw. Next to this little volume stands the reprint made for Mr. Obadiah Rich in Paris in 1845, being number 64 of an edition of 125 numbered copies. And next to this the Dutch translation of Pieter vander Aa, Leyden, 1707. An opportunity to compare these printed records with the manuscript originals occurred during the winter of 1904–05 when those precious documents were loaned to the Society and were on exhibition for several weeks,

together with other archives from the College of St. Mary's at Montreal.

Here, also, is the *Dernières découvertes dans l'Amérique septentrionale de M. de la Sale, par Tonti*, Paris, 1687, which Tonti repudiated, and the English translation of the faithful Joutel's *Journal of the Last Voyage performed by Monsr. de la Sale*, London, 1714; here we may read Hennepin's version of affairs in French, Dutch, and English, likewise that of La Honton. Later we find Charlevoix, La Potherie, the Jesuit Relations, Margry, etc.

The collection in the department of geography and travels beginning with the nineteenth century lacks few if any works of importance, and contains many volumes of the greatest rarity. Here are numerous editions of Lewis and Clark, Patrick Gass, and other early travelers.

The collection of maps, directories, gazetteers, and guides to the Central West is remarkably rich, and among these latter are many rare and curious emigrants' guides filled with directions and advice to prospective settlers. The collection of county atlases and histories of Illinois and the surrounding states is also large.

A great effort has been made to assemble examples of all the early newspapers and periodicals published in Illinois, with the result that over two hundred titles are catalogued, forming an almost inexhaustible source of information as to the politics, manners, and customs of bygone days.

The Library is a government repository for United States documents, and also receives the publications of Illinois and the surrounding states. Notable in this department are the rare original editions of the statutes of the Northwest Territory, Indiana Territory, and Illinois Territory, 1788 to 1818, comprising seventeen volumes.

Classification and Cataloguing.—Reclassification by the Cutter Expansive plan for special collections is in progress. A typewritten card-catalogue of the dictionary type is in course of preparation. The special catalogue of maps chronologically arranged under localities contained 1,500 entries January 1. An Index of Portraits of residents of Illinois and the adjacent states contains at date over 12,000 entries, drawn entirely from oil-portraits, portrait busts, photographs, and illustrated books in the possession of the Society.

Publications.—The series of Collections published by the Society consists at present of the following: Volume I., History of the English Settlement in Edwards County, Illinois, by George Flower, with notes by Honorable E. B. Washburne, 1882, 408 p.; Volume II., Sketch of Enoch Long, an Illinois Pioneer, by Harvey Reid, 1884, 112 p., the two preceding volumes being published at the expense of the late Levi Z. Leiter; Volume III., The Edwards Papers, edited by E. B. Washburne, 1884, 632 p.; Volume IV., Early Chicago and Illinois, Sketches of Gurdon S. Hubbard, and others, 1889, 400 p. In addition to the above the Society has published some forty papers on historical subjects presented at its meetings, and the Annual Reports of the Executive Committee, which contain the Librarian's reports.

Lectures.—Historical lectures are maintained during each winter.

Regulations.—The Library, Museum, and collection of paintings are open daily, except Sunday, from 9 A.M. to 5 P.M., and are free to visitors. Classes of pupils from the schools, under fifteen years of age, must be accompanied by their teachers.

Officers.—President, Franklin H. Head; vice-presidents,

Thomas Dent and Lambert Tree; treasurer, Orson Smith; secretary, J. W. Fertig; executive committee, Edward E. Ayer, Joseph T. Bowen, William A. Fuller, Charles F. Gunther, Samuel H. Kerfoot, Jr., George Merryweather, Walter C. Newberry, and Otto L. Schmidt.

CAROLINE M. MCILVAINE, Librarian.

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